



LIBERIA MEDIA DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

September 2015 - September 2020 | Implementer: **INTERNEWS**

The primary goal of the program is to increase citizens' access to independent and reliable information and empower them to engage in well-informed public discussions on issues of national importance. The program support focuses on media peak bodies, media development agencies, commercial media outlets, community radio stations, government information offices and the development of enabling media regulatory environment.

Specifically, the Liberia Media Development activity will lead to:

- Increased **sustainability** of media houses;
- A **plurality of voices** represented in Liberian media and improved quality of the media;
- Improved **professional standards** of journalism;
- Strengthened **normative-legal enabling environment** for freer media; and,
- **Freedom Of Information Laws** - Strengthened Independent Information Commission to respond to requests from citizens and media establishments.

Current Activities

- **Journalism training** and in-house mentoring to improve the quality of reporting on elections national dialogues, public finance, government transparency and accountability.
- **Business management** mentoring and training to media outlets to develop alternative revenue streams and sustainable business models;
- **Media Market Forum** continued to stimulate advertising income from businesses, thereby improving the financial sustainability of local media outlets;
- **Technical support** and ongoing training to 21 community radio stations throughout the country to improve citizens' access to independent and reliable information;

- **Media law reform** advocacy through conferences, training, professional mentoring, technical advice, meetings and high level engagement of the main stakeholders; and
- **FOI** - Information Commission, government information and reporters strengthened in implementation of Liberia's Freedom of Information (FOI) Act.

Accomplishment to Date

- **Elections Media Debates and Journalism Reporting.** Citizen engagement was significantly increased in 2017 Elections through LMD journalism training, codes of practice development, 15 community media forums and lower house elections media debates. 126 debates were staged in partnership with 50 media agencies in all 73 districts with 584 candidates attending. 23,000 people (5,901 F ; 16,292 M) attended the debates in person. The debates were broadcast 550 times on 43 radio stations, plus pre & post reporting. 25% of eligible voters listened to the debates. A Harvard study and Internews focus group research found a significant increase in voter engagement, trust and turnout on Election Day as an outcome of the debates. 6% of listeners reported changing their voting preference as a result of information gleaned from debates;
- **Community dialogue activities** through 25 community media forums with community radio stations, local CSO's and government officials conducted in 10 counties around the national budget, presidential run-off and bi-election in Foya, Lofa County, resulted in a more informed electorate;
- **21 community radio stations** in all 15 counties of Liberia, received capacity-building interventions, business management training, and station upgrades enabling them to support effective and balanced coverage of the 2017 elections and other important local and national issues;
- **CSDf nationwide reporting** - training of over 50 journalists to report on CSDf stories and corresponding legislative reform. Over 35 stories have been published to date. CSDf accountability at a local level was also foregrounded in the nationwide debates by including this issue as the first question of all 584 candidates in each of the 126 media elections debates;
- **5263 days of training** delivered to media professionals across all counties of Liberia;
- **CENTAL online budget portal** launched to enable journalists and citizens access to government budget information;
- **Ganta Media Resource Center** – YMCA is host to a media resource center offering computer and internet access to journalists and young people from rural Liberia. Training in basic ICT skills and more advanced journalism production has also been delivered. Total visits to the MRC since opening on the 15th February 2018 are 646 (F 145 ; M 501).
- **Local Voices Liberia** online platform to increase content sharing between rural journalists and rural media outlets across the nation, enhancing the representation of rural citizens and communities in national dialogue;
- **FOI Act strengthened** by training government information officers and leading journalists to use the legislation as a central tool in their investigative reporting, resulting in 133 FOI requests and over 40 published stories to date;
- **Journalist Code of Conduct** revised by Press Union of Liberia and socialized, which includes special conduct requirements for the press during the elections, and outlines the actions journalists need to take to conduct themselves in an ethical manner;

- **National Media Council** established through technical advice and training of PUL and other key stakeholders, including the legal fraternity, to enforce the PUL Code of Conduct and mitigate intractable disputes arising: during and after the election period; reporting on corruption and government accountability;
- **Media Law Moot Court** activities delivered through support to the Bar Association and Law School of Liberia. Support included the development of curriculum, training of a team of students to represent Liberia for the first time in the Oxford Price Regional Moot Court Competition in South Africa. Two Media Law Moot Courts were performed by newly trained Liberian Lawyers at the annual Bar Association retreats in 2016 and 2017, the latter being broadcast on KMTV and watched by over 6000 people;
- **Decriminalization of defamation** introduced through revisions in the criminal code through an Act in Parliament that was passed in the lower house in 2018, and awaits review in the Senate;
- **Annual Media Ratings Surveys** conducted by GeoPoll for the first time in Liberia to enable media and business to better understand the audience reach of local media for the purposes of client base enhancement;
- **Media Market Forum** established to circulate the audience ratings data and equip stakeholders with an improved understanding of media audiences and market trends to increase advertising income from businesses;

Planned Outcomes

- **National dialogue for electoral reform** enhanced through increased citizen engagement and awareness of the key issues in advance of the 2020 elections;
- **Elections media professionalism** in promoting transparency and public accountability in follow up reporting of 2017 election cycle, upcoming bi-elections and in preparation for the 2020 elections through media forums, reporting, and engagement with the Press Bureau of Parliament in populating a candidate “promise tracker” on the Observer online portal;
- **County Social Development Funds** reporting in 15 counties to improve citizen engagement in the allocation of funds and to improve transparency and accountability in the implementation of CSDF funded projects;
- **Enabling media regulatory environment** through: improved transparency and planning in broadcast license regime; passing of the amendments to the criminal code in the Senate; improved effectiveness of the National Media Council in mediating disputes; improved media law knowledge of the PUL, senior editors, leading journalists, defenders and the Bar Association;
- **The Business of Online Media** - Leading media agencies are able to transition to online media platforms sustainably ahead of the exponential growth of internet access through smart phones across Liberia in the wake of Liberia’s growing telecommunications sector enhancements;
- **Government of Liberia budget** processes are more accessible to citizens and journalists;
- **Media market data** available and routinely shared within the Media Market Forum, media owners, and advertisers;
- **Business plans** implemented by partner media outlets with an eye toward financial sustainability.